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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20505

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR

17 February 1972

MEMORANDUM FOR:

[REDACTED]  
Assistant Deputy Director for Intelligence  
Defense Intelligence Agency

SUBJECT :

[REDACTED]

1. In response to your request for intelligence assistance in your consideration of [REDACTED] we have prepared and assembled the following information and materials:

a. A set of photographs and four map boards showing Ha Lo prison in various contexts.

b. A memorandum entitled "Considerations Affecting the Problem of Tunnelling at Ha Lo Prison in Hanoi," to which is appended a supplementary note on water table and soil conditions in Hanoi.

c. A memorandum entitled "Security Conditions in North Vietnam," to which we have appended the texts of or pertinent extracts from several previously disseminated intelligence reports.

2. Item a above (the photographs and map boards) was given to a representative of General Manor's office on 14 February. Items b and c are attached herewith.

3. In addition to the specific materials noted above, we offer the following general comments framed in light of your overall request for intelligence support. First and foremost, we emphasize that the

Agency cannot assure you that any American prisoners are incarcerated at Ha Lo as of this writing. Indeed, our most recent reporting (e.g., [redacted] indicates that some or all of the American prisoners in Ha Lo may have been moved to another location.

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4. If we assume that U.S. prisoners are incarcerated in Ha Lo -- a working assumption which, we stress, may not be valid -- an escape plan of the type envisaged in [redacted] would seem to divide into three phases, each with its own security considerations or problems:

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- a. Getting out of the prison proper.
- b. Getting from the prison area to the outskirts of Hanoi.
- c. Getting from the outskirts of Hanoi to the agreed rendezvous point.

5. The tunnelling memorandum attached hereto outlines the physical and security problems involved in getting from inside the prison to a point outside its walls. These problems -- both technical and practical -- are of themselves formidable.

6. Even if [redacted] participants successfully escape the prison proper, their problems would be far from over. The second stage of the exercise -- reaching Hanoi's outskirts undetected and unapprehended -- would perhaps be even more difficult. Ha Lo prison is located in almost the very center of downtown Hanoi. On its eastern side, quite literally just across the street, is the courthouse and Ministry of Justice -- an installation with its own guard component. A block and a half to the south is the Lao Dong Communist Party headquarters building. Diagonally across from the intersection at the prison's northwest corner is the Vietnam broadcasting station which, again, probably has at least a minimal sentry force of its own. Immediately nearby are two hospitals, both of which could have activity (hence, potential observers) around the clock. Other government buildings are in near proximity as is the main railroad station and

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the main road to the south (Route 1A). The whole area, in short, is likely to be saturated with various types of government and Party officials -- not to mention police and security elements of several kinds -- either actually on guard or patrol duty or simply going about their normal business. To put it very mildly, this is not an easy area for foreigners to traverse undetected even under optimum circumstances. Furthermore, there is one point on which all our Hanoi sources are in near universal agreement: in North Vietnam, including Hanoi, foreigners automatically attract a great deal of attention -- not just police or security surveillance but great scrutiny from ordinary folk motivated by simple curiosity. Virtually all of our sources report that it is almost impossible for any foreigner to engage in the simplest private activity -- going for a walk, riding a bicycle, mailing a letter at the post office -- without swiftly collecting a crowd of curious onlookers. The problems this fact of Hanoi life would generate for escaping prisoners are obvious.

7. Even if the escapees were to reach the outskirts of Hanoi without being apprehended, they would still have some 25-35 kilometers of well-inhabited countryside to traverse before reaching the rendezvous point. There would probably be a somewhat lower density of actual government or security officials in this area than might be encountered within Hanoi city, but on the other hand, non-oriental foreigners would become progressively more conspicuous -- and inherently suspicious -- the further one moved from the downtown Hanoi area. The types of controls and checkpoints the escapees would be likely to encounter are outlined in the attached memorandum on security conditions in North Vietnam. It should also be remembered that foreigners are not usually allowed outside of Hanoi except on specifically approved journeys which almost invariably involve the company of a government provided interpreter/guide/escort, who is (obviously) also a watchdog and is normally the one who actually talks with the police or soldiers manning any checkpoints encountered. Foreigners travelling unescorted outside of Hanoi would be immediately suspect to virtually everyone (or anyone) who spotted them.

8. It is certainly true that seemingly impossible escapes from prison have been successfully made, particularly by resourceful and determined men in wartime. The odds against [redacted] success, however, would appear to be astronomical. Even with local

help -- i. e., persons to meet the prisoners just outside the wall, conceal them, and guide or transport them to the rendezvous point -- [redacted] would be a very dicey proposition. It would require almost literally incredible luck for a small, unaided group of caucasian escapees -- without normal clothes, documentation, fluency in Vietnamese or detailed area knowledge (not to mention maps or compass) -- to go under the Ha Lo wall, get out of Hanoi, and traverse 35-odd kilometers of open country to find and reach an agreed rendezvous point within a narrow time frame.

9. Per your request, and for obvious reasons, we have kept our analysis and data collection efforts in support of [redacted] tightly compartmented and under very stringent control. This memorandum, with its attachments, is being hand carried to your office and one copy is being personally delivered to General Manor.

/s/  
George A. Carver, Jr.  
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachments

cc: General Manor

O/DCI/SAVA:GACarver, Jr/mee

Distribution:

Orig - Admiral Whitmire w/atts

1 - General Manor w/atts

1 - [redacted] file w/atts

1 - GAC Chrono w/o atts ✓

1 - handcarried to Secretary Laird by GAC

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The Director

GACarver, Jr.

Attached is a memorandum I want you  
to see before it goes to the Department  
of Defense.

George A. Carver, Jr.  
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

Attachment